

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00

NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-10 ACDA-05

MC-02 /071 W

----- 045945

R 060838Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASDHC 1118

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

KUALA LUMPUR 2938

DIA WASHDC

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 2876

E O 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, RP

SUBJ: MARCOS SUGGESTS FIGHT-TALK STRATEGY IN SOUTH (AGAIN)

REF: A) MANILA 2875; B) MANILA 1913

BEGIN SUMMARY: FOLLOWING MARCH 3 BRIEFING BY MILITARY COMMANDERS, PRESIDENT MARCOS ANNOUNCED HE HAS ORDERED INTENSIFIED CONTACTS WITH "VARIOUS REBEL GROUPS" (NOT JUST MORO NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT --MNLF) AND ORDERED "REDEPLOYMENT" OF TROOPS TO BRING ABOUT PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT AND AT SAME TIME PROTECT CIVILIANS AGAINST MUSLIM ATROCITIES. ACCORDING SOURCE WHO WAS PRESENT, DISCUSSION AT BRIEFING ACTUALLY CENTERED AROUND PLEA FROM SECDEF ENRILE TO ALLOW ARMED FORCE TO GO ON OFFENSIVE. PRESIDENT REPORTEDLY RULED OUT SUCH MEASURES UNTIL AFTER RENEWAL OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH MNLF SCHEDULED FOR APRIL. IN FACT, MILITARY ARE ALREADY PRESSING ABOUT AS HARD AS THEY CAN AND PROBABLY WON'T BE ABLE TO DO MUCH MORE UNTIL PLANNED BUILDUP ENHANCES THEIR CAPABILITY. END SUMMARY.

1. FOLLOWING MEETING WITH ARMED FORCES COMMANDERS AT CAMP
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AGUINALDO ON MARCH 3, PRESIDENT SAID HE HAS DIRECTED FOLLOW-

ING MEASURES:

A) INTENSIFIED EFFORTS BY ARMED FORCES TO CONTACT "VARIOUS REBEL GROUPS" IN SOUTH, NOT JUST THE MNLF WHICH HE SAID PROBABLY CONTROLS ONLY 30 TO 50 PERCENT OF REBELS;

B) "REDEPLOYMENT" OF TROOPS TO BRING ABOUT PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT BUT AT SAME TIME PROTECT CIVILIANS FROM ATROCITIES (REFTEL).

2. SIMULTANEOUSLY SEC OF DEFENSE ENRILE REPORTEDLY ASSURED PRESIDENT THAT DESPITE SUPERIORITY OF ARMED FORCES OVER REBELS, MILITARY HAS EXERCISED POLICY OF RESTRAINT AND (ACCORDING MALACANANG PRESS RELEASE) "HAS CONTINUED TO TAKE ONLY DEFENSIVE, NEVER OFFENSIVE ACTION AGAINST THE REBEL GROUP."

3. COMMENT: LATEST GOVERNMENT RHETORIC ON MINDANAO NOT BEST GUIDE TO FACTS OR TO POLICY LIKELY TO BE IMPLEMENTED. ACCORDING PHILIPPINE OFFICER WHO WAS PRESENT, AGUINALDO BRIEFINGS CENTERED AROUND (UNPUBLICIZED) STRONG PLEA FROM ENRILE TO BE ALLOWED TO GO ON OFFENSIVE IN MINDANAO. MARCOS ALLEGEDLY REPLIED THAT HE WANTED TO DO NOTHING UNTIL AFTER RESUMPTION OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH MNLF (UNCERTAINLY SCHEDULED FOR APRIL) BUT IF TALKS FAILED AFP COULD TAKE VIGOROUS ACTION AS DESIRED.

4. IN FACT, THERE IS AMPLE EVIDENCE THAT AFP HAS BEEN PROSECUTING WAR ABOUT AS HARD AS POSSIBLE IN PAST MONTHS, DESPITE TALK OF CEASE FIRES, "DEFENSIVE ACTION ONLY" AND THE LIKE. IT IS MOST LIKELY THAT GOVERNMENT WILL MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO IMPROVE ITS MILITARY POSITION BEFORE RENEWAL OF TALKS WITH MNLF (IF SUCH OCCUR). HOWEVER, ALL THIS SOMEWHAT ACADEMIC SINCE UNTIL AFP ATTAINS GREATER CAPABILITY VIA CURRENT BUILDUP PROGRAM (INCLUDING DEPLOYMENT OF FOUR NEW BATTALIONS) GOVERNMENT WILL NOT BE ABLE TO PRESS MUCH HARDER THAN IT IS ALREADY PRESSING.

5. PRESIDENT'S REFERENCE TO "VARIOUS REBEL GROUPS" IS CONSISTENT WITH STANDARD GOP LINE THAT THE INTRANSIGENT MNLF CANNOT SPEAK FOR ALL MUSLIM REBELS (MUCH LESS FOR ALL MUSLIM FILIPINOS.) THIS ALLEGATION ONLY HALF TRUE AT BEST. WHILE MNLF IS FACTIONALIZED, IT IS THE ONLY MUSLIM INSURGENT
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ORGANIZATION WITH A FOLLOWING THROUGHOUT THE SOUTH AND WHICH CAN LEGITIMATELY CLAIM MORE THAN BANDIT OR PRIVATE ARMY STATUS.
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